

POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS BULLETIN

THE CLINICAL CENTER

Medical Administrative Series

M97-6 (rev.)

20 October 2000

MANUAL TRANSMITTAL SHEET

SUBJECT: Suspected Missing Patient

1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: This bulletin transmits the policy and processes of the Clinical Center regarding missing patients. Its former name, "Suspected Child/Adolescent Abduction or Elopement," was changed to reflect the policy's broadened scope. The revised policy was approved by the Medical Executive Committee on 17 October 2000.
2. Material Superseded: MAS No. M97-6, dated 21 October 1997
3. Filing Instructions: "Other" Section

Remove: No. M97-6, dated 21 October 1997

Insert: No. M97-6 (rev.), dated 20 October 2000

DISTRIBUTION

Physicians, Dentists and Other Practitioners Participating in Patient Care

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SUBJECT: Suspected Missing Patient

PURPOSE

This policy statement describes the process to be implemented when it is suspected that a patient is missing from the Clinical Center.

POLICY

All patients leaving an inpatient unit should notify a nurse prior to doing so. All children under the age of 12 years must be escorted by a staff member, parent, or designated adult 18 years or older when leaving the patient care unit or outpatient clinic. Parents and children will be instructed on admission to the unit to notify a nurse when leaving the unit. If a patient is suspected to be missing (eloped, lost or abducted) from the Hospital, the Clinical Center staff will make every effort to locate and arrange for the safe return of the patient.

PROCEDURE

When a patient is missing from a patient care unit or outpatient clinic and it is suspected that the patient has eloped, been abducted, or is lost, the following procedure shall occur:

- I. The unit nursing staff will:
 - A. Conduct a unit search.
 - B. Contact the page operator to facilitate an overhead page announcement for the patient to return to the unit.
- II. The Charge Nurse/Nurse Manager will:

- A. Notify NIH Security at #115 and provide a physical description of the patient and the clothes they were last seen wearing.
 - B. Notify the patient's attending physician and/or the physician on call.
 - C. Notify the Nurse Manager or Nursing Supervisor on call.
 - D. Notify family as appropriate.
 - E. If a child or adolescent under the age of 18 is missing, the following additional notifications must take place:
 - 1. Notify the parent or guardian to verify that the child's location is not known.
 - 2. Notify the Children's Inn, to see if the child is present at that location.
- III. The Nursing Service Supervisor on call will notify the Service Chief on Call.
- IV. The Service Chief on call will notify the Administrator On Call.
- V. The NIH Police will:
- A. Conduct a search and report the outcome to the Charge Nurse/Nurse Manager.
 - B. Contact the Montgomery County Police if the patient is not located, if appropriate.
 - C. Advise the Administrator On Call as to whether or not to contact the Office of Clinical Center Communications (OCCC) regarding media notification.
- VI. The Administrator On Call will contact the Office of Clinical Center Communications (OCCC), if considered advisable by law enforcement, and authorize the preparation of a media statement.
- VII. OCCC staff will:
- A. Obtain identifying information (description of the patient and clothing worn by the patient when last seen) and the family's telephone number from the Charge Nurse.
 - B. Contact the family to inform them that a media statement is being prepared and obtain their agreement to release the statement.
 - C. Contact local TV and radio stations with a media statement to be aired at the next scheduled newscast.
 - D. Manage all media inquiries related to this event.
- VIII. Social work staff will assist the patient's family members and the staff during the crisis. For all NIMH patients, the NIMH social work staff should be notified of the incident. For all other patients, notify the unit social worker or the on call Social Worker for assistance after hours.

IX. UPON LOCATING THE PATIENT:

- A. The NIH Police will:
 - 1. Notify the Charge Nurse/Nurse Manager that the patient has been located and describe the patient's status.
 - 2. Notify the Administrator On Call regarding the return status of the patient.
- B. The Administrator On Call will:
 - 1. If needed, arrange for transportation of the patient to the Clinical Center.
 - 2. Inform the OCCC that the patient has been located and of the return status of the patient.
- C. The Charge Nurse/Nurse Manager will:
 - 1. Contact the attending physician or on call physician when the patient is located.
 - 2. Contact the Service Supervisor when the patient is located.
 - 3. Contact the family and/or legal representative, as appropriate, when the patient is located.
 - If the missing patient is a child or adolescent under 18 years of age, contact patients or guardian when the patient is located.
- D. The Service Supervisor will call the Administrator On Call when the patient is located.
- E. The Administrator On Call will inform the OCCC when the patient is located.
- F. The OCCC will contact the media, if applicable, when the patient is located.

X. UPON RETURN TO THE UNIT:

- A. The unit nursing staff will:
 - 1. Assess and document the status of the patient.
 - 2. Complete the Occurrence Report.
 - 3. Notify the attending physician/physician on call that the patient has returned to the unit.
- B. The physician will assess the patient document the assessment in the medical record.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

The event will be reported through the occurrence reporting system.